

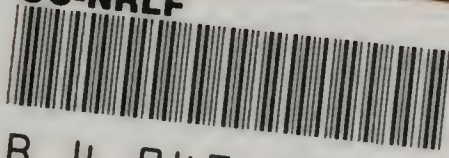
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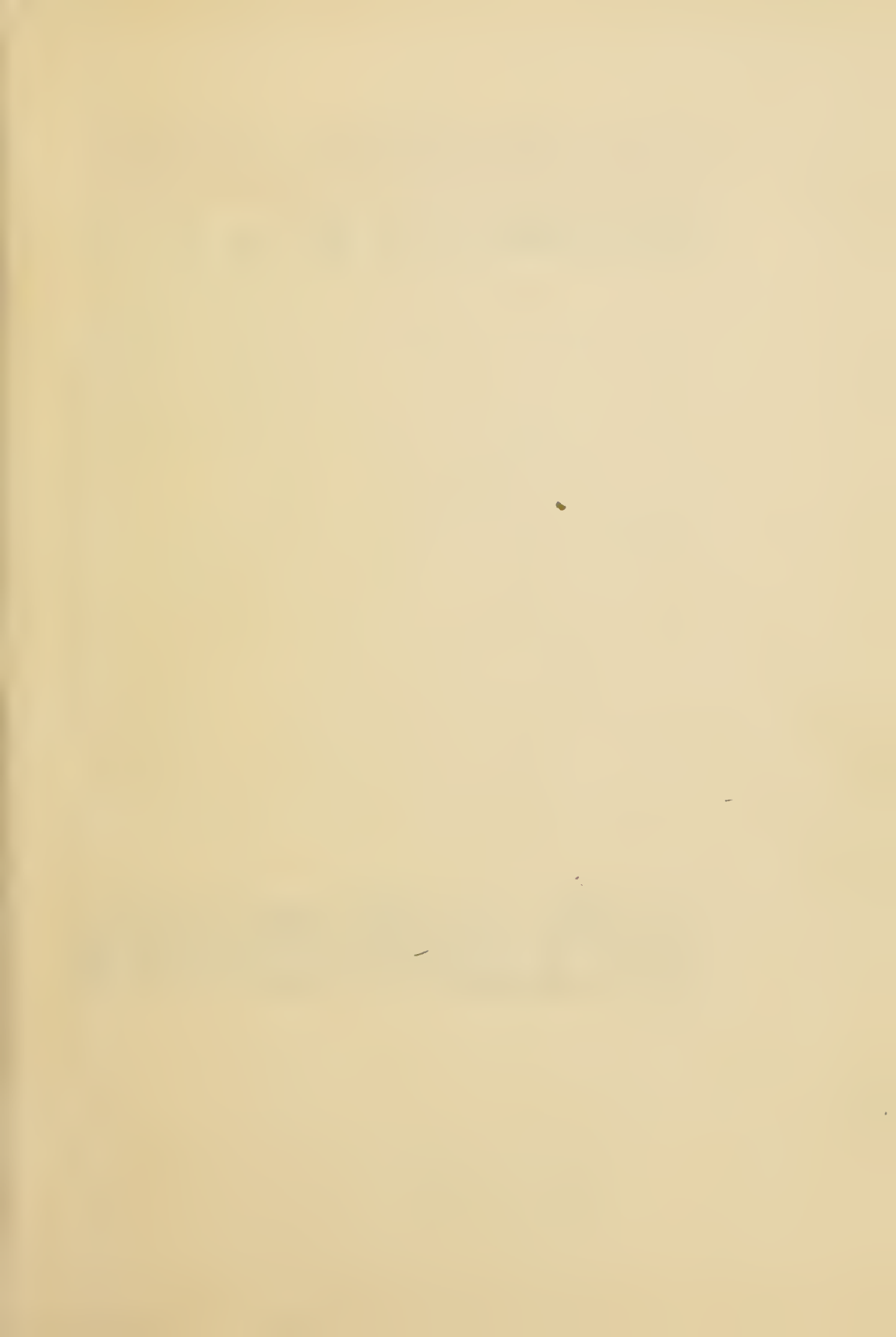
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AUBREY BEARDSLEY AS A
DESIGNER OF BOOK-PLATES

 BY A. E. GALLATIN

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AUBREY BEARDSLEY AS A DESIGNER OF BOOK-PLATES



NO artist has shown greater versatility in his work than Aubrey Beardsley. His designs include illustrations for many of the classics, scenes from the operas, purely decorative drawings, portraits, posters, caricatures, drawings keenly satirical, book-covers, title-pages, book-plates. Knowing that he was a musical prodigy, an amateur actor, the writer of considerable prose and poetry of much merit, and

that his knowledge of books was very great, we may say that the variety shown in his work was a reflection of the versatility of the artist.

The really essential viewpoint for considering Beardsley's drawings is the purely technical one of the artist and the connoisseur. The decorative qualities in his work have never been surpassed by any artist whose work has been in black and white. Beardsley is primarily an "artist's artist," and the qualities of his wonderful and beautiful line and perfect arrangement of his

masses are the elements in his work which will make it immortal. The aesthetic qualities in his drawings are not those which mean mere popularity. It is true his drawings had a greater vogue than those of any other artist of his age, but just why they had seems difficult of explanation, unless, as one critic holds, his ignoring of perspective and proportion, and his freedom, to a certain extent, of convention, caused his works to meet with a succès de scandale.

It seems strange that Beardsley is not better known than

he is as a designer of Ex Libris. In what I suppose may be called an exhaustive and monumental work, "Artists and Engravers of British and American Book-Plates" (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1897), by Henry W. Fincham, about 5,000 book-plates by more than 1,500 artists are catalogued. Mr. Fincham, however, only knew of the plate Beardsley designed for John Lumsden Propert.

While it is true that Beardsley designed but comparatively few book-plates, this phase of his art is a very interesting one.

EX LIBRIS

JOHN
LVMSDEN
PROPERT



1893

Not taking rank with his very finest work, his book-plates nevertheless compare very favorably with the best examples of the pictorial style of plate.

The first book-plate Beardsley designed was the one for Dr. John Lumsden Propert, the famous collector of miniatures. It was executed in 1893, as we can see from the date on the drawing placed beneath the artist's signature device. The plate is a characteristic example of one of Beardsley's various manners—the phase of his work in which he delighted in depicting pierrots and

candles guttered by unseen gusts of air.

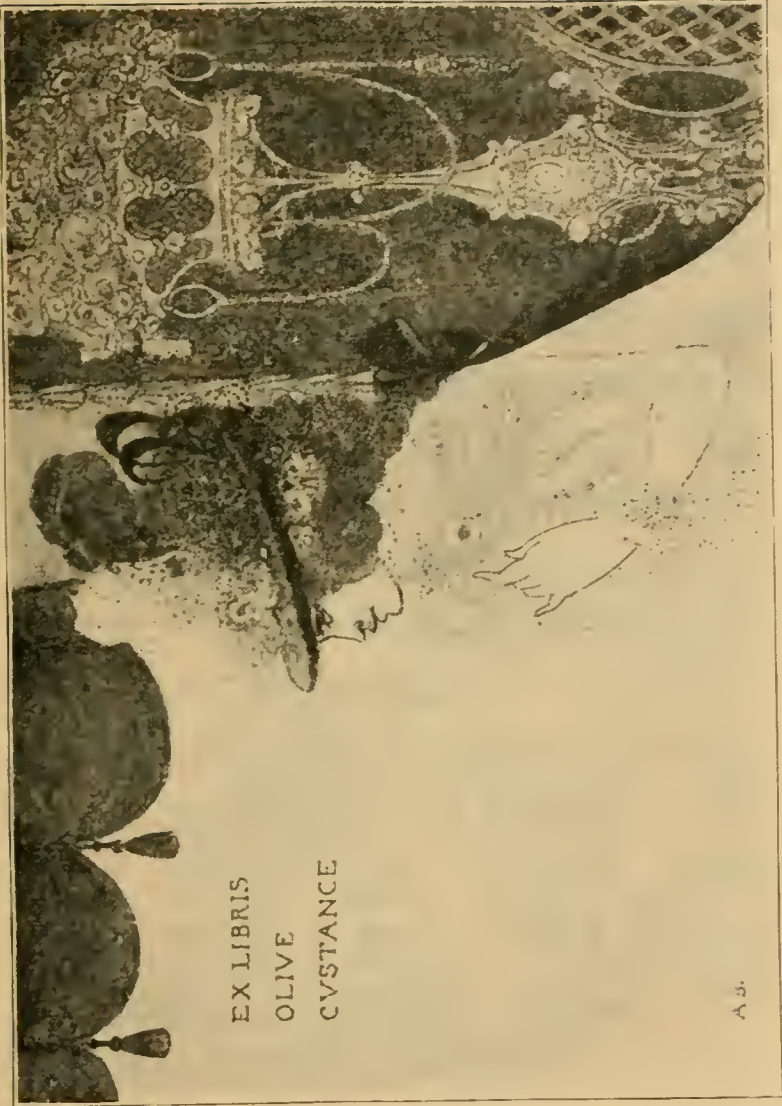
Another book-plate designed by Beardsley at this time was merely one of his elaborate border designs for "Le Morte d'Arthur" (1893-4), converted into an Ex Libris. The late Gleeson White made note of this, in a paragraph or so devoted to Beardsley's book-plates in his essay on British book-plates. (Vide "Modern Book-Plates and their Designers." London and New York: John Lane, 1898-9.) This is all the data he gave, and I am unable to add to this

meagre information. In the same way Mr. White listed a Savoy Magazine prospectus made into a plate. There were two Savoy prospectuses, and they were printed in 1895. Unlike several other drawings made into book-plates, these two may be authorized, says Mr. White. Another design of this nature I know of, which has never been mentioned in print, is the drawing "The Scarlet Pastoral" with "The Book-Plate of H. F. W. Manners-Sutton" written on it. I do not know whether this was added by Beardsley or not.

Aside from its value as a book-plate, Beardsley's "Ex Libris Olive Custance" is perhaps the most notable of his minor drawings. As a book-plate it is certainly most charming.

The drawing entitled "Aubrey Beardsley's Book-Plate," reproduced in the first "Book of Fifty Drawings by Aubrey Beardsley," is in reality no book-plate at all. It is even doubtful if Beardsley ever used it as such.


Gleeson White, in the essay I have already referred to, also speaks of book-plates designed by Beardsley for Alaister Crow-



EX LIBRIS
OLIVE
CVSTANCE

A 3.

ley and Gerald Kelly, adding that they have not been reproduced — probably using this word as meaning published. A short time ago I came into possession of these plates, and find they are reproductions of the portrait of Madame Réjane drawn by Beardsley in 1893, and reproduced on page 78 of “The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley” (1899) and of the drawing representing Flosshilde (1896). To these drawings have been added, with a pen, “Ex Libris Alaister Crowley” and “Ex Libris Gerald Kelly.”

 Eighty-five copies of this book have been printed on hand-made paper and three on Japanese vellum during December, 1902, at the De Vinne Press, New York, United States of America.

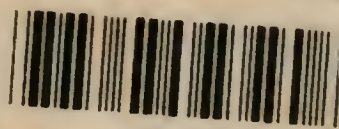


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